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ABSTRACT

Since 1956 the "Core Program" in the Omaha (Nebraska) Public School System has been a central part of the seventh through ninth grade curriculum. The program is interdisciplinary combining the teaching of language arts and social studies in blocks of two or three hours. These extended periods allow for the integration of academic subjects and for more group guidance. The relationships between teachers and their students have become quite personalized. The flexibility of the Core Program allows participation in enrichment activities such as these: (1) newspaper projects; (2) integration of drama productions with curriculum; (3) living in an out-of-doors laboratory; (4) classroom visits by businesses; (5) the integration of computers into curriculum; (6) extended library time; (7) interdisciplinary experiences; (8) enriching resources; (9) intramural debate; (10) spelling competition; (11) entrance into National History Day competition; and (12) links with national scholars. The program is especially designed to meet the personal and social needs of adolescents in junior high school to help them achieve maximum learning and development. Although guidance is not taught as a separate area, concern for guidance is inherent in the curriculum. Teachers conduct group guidance sessions and counsel individual students. (VM)

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HIGHLIGHTS OF CORE

The Core program is alive and well in the Omaha Public School System.

— The Omaha Public School system is a system of learning in an urban school district which serves approximately 40,000 students.

— The ethnic composition of students served is 26.3 Black, 2.4 Hispanic, 1.1 Oriental and 2.0 Indian.

— Within the system are eight senior high schools, 13 junior high schools and 62 elementary schools.

— The Core program is a part of the seventh and eighth grade curriculum offerings in eleven of the thirteen junior high schools. The two remaining junior high schools are ninth grade centers.

— Core has been employed as a curriculum pattern in the system since 1956.

— A staff of 104 teachers provide educational experiences in the Core block.

— The Core program is interdisciplinary in nature and is one in which language arts and social studies are the combined subjects.

— A two or three hour block of time permits time for correlation and integration of subjects and skills taught in the Core block.

— The extended block of time also allows time for group guidance and a more personalized teacher-student relationship.

CORE
ENRICHMENT UNITS AND ACTIVITIES

Because Core is flexible, we can do many other things. We can . . .

teach newspaper units

The Core program recognizes the need to improve student use of the newspaper. The opportunity to have the **Omaha World-Herald** delivered to each class for a two-week period during the year is available to each Core teacher.

integrate professional community drama productions with curriculum offerings

Three performances of "A Christmas Carol" are presented by the Nebraska Theatre Caravan at Technical High School for all seventh grade Core students. These performances usher in the magic of the holiday season as students share in the joy of seeing the production.

experience living in an out-of-doors laboratory

Students are allowed to learn out of doors in an Outdoor Education project. This program takes the students out doors where they live for three days embracing learning activities that deal directly with the natural resources and life situations that are found in an outdoor setting.

bring business to the classroom

In cooperation with Junior Achievement, a unit in economic education, Project Business, is taught to eighth grade students. The program brings the resources of business to the classroom to help students become aware of the basic workings of the business community in which they live.

integrate computers into the curriculum components

Each junior high school has several computers available for use to students and teachers. Core teachers are involved in computer inservice which teaches them not only to use the computer, but also how to select and integrate software into the curriculum.

schedule extended library time

Classes are scheduled into the library each week for full class periods and are taught library skills by the librarian. Skills are reinforced by the classroom teacher.

be a part of other interdisciplinary experiences

Art — combine art production work with various units of study: masks, murals, class projects, etc.
Science — write themes on scientific excursions
Mathematics — do computation required in total school minature city-election

supplement curriculum units with enriching resources

Society for Creative Anachronism: This society recreates the Middle Ages through music, dance and dramatic interpretation. Each year the performers made up of professors, families and other interested persons produce a Renaissance Festival which can be staged at schools.
Living History Society: A society of elderly citizens that speak to classes on historical subjects.
Nebraska Historical Society: Archives of state history are provided to any school that makes a request.
Local Universities: Various departments are gracious in providing speakers on various subjects.
Law Enforcement — Police in the classroom: Local police department sponsors a unit informing students about the responsibilities of citizens and responsibilities of the police.

sponsor intramural junior high debate

Junior High School Debate is designed to provide an exploratory experience for those students who may feel they have an interest in forensic art. Each junior high school participates in the debate program by sponsoring debate teams and sending these teams to the All-City Debate Tournament. This program includes workshops and inservice meetings for students and coaches as well. A different resolution is debated each year.

enter into spelling competition

Students participate each year in the Midwest Spelling Bee which is sponsored by the **Omaha World-Herald.** The Bee is designed to help boys and girls improve their spelling, increase their vocabularies, and develop correct English usage that will help them all their lives. The Omaha Public School System is permitted to have one winner from local contests advance to the Midwest Spelling Bee.

contend for honors in National History Day competition

For two years Omaha Public School students have participated in the National History Day activities. During each of these years Core students have been winners in the Regional Competition, have advanced to State, and finally have competed at the National level.

link with national scholars

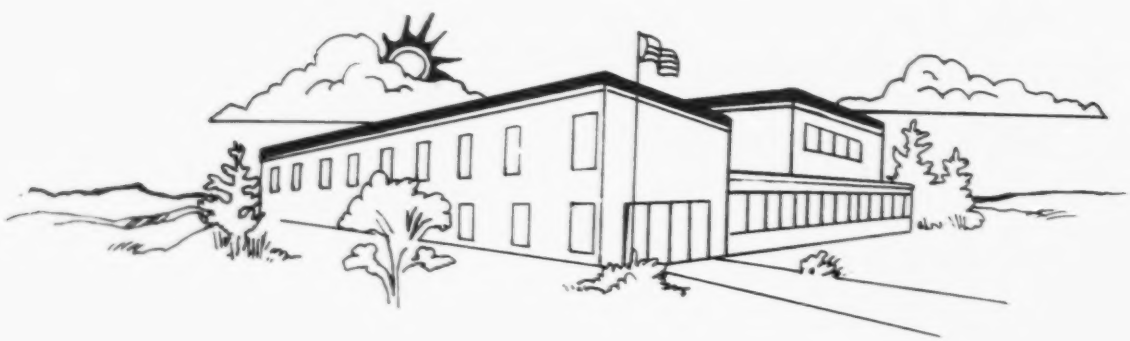
The National Junior Honor Society has enjoyed steady growth in the school system since its introduction in 1974. The Society was then introduced as an organization designed to stimulate high standards of student performance in the beginning years of the secondary school. It remains a lively, growing organization, fulfilling its aims in junior high schools.

OMAHA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES
THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL CORE PROGRAM

Adolescents between the ages of 13 and 15 have been defined in many ways. However, there is general agreement that because of their being in between child and adult age, they have many characteristics and needs which must be wisely considered in the process of curriculum planning. Physical, mental and emotional pressures are generated within the student as a result of rapid growth and from a great desire to find a place in society. Knowledge about and acceptance of such pressures form the basis of the "why" of the core curriculum in the junior high schools of Omaha. The following traits may characterize junior high students.

1. Their energies are often sapped by the sheer prowess of physical growth spurts.
2. They are often unable to understand their own feelings or to justify those feelings to others.
3. They are caught up in a whirl of diversified subject areas and widening social activities as they leave the smaller elementary school and enter the larger junior high.
4. They are now confronted by decisions which will affect their entire lives.
5. They are pressured by peer group mores as they seek acceptance in society.
6. They are confused by the shifting attitudes of parents, teachers, and society in general, all of whom may doubt them and their behavior.
7. They are bewildered by the complex and rapidly changing civilization into which they soon must fit.

The core curriculum, mindful of the nature and needs of these young adolescents, is designed to provide the type of educational setting necessary to achieve maximum learning and personal development for seventh and eighth grade students.



ORIGIN AND FEATURES OF CORE

Efforts to find better ways to serve the needs of all youth have focused attention on the "core" of the curriculum. Historically, at the center of the curriculum were those subjects required of all students. The improvement of this area of general education has become the objective of much curriculum experimentation. Although some experimentation with the secondary school curriculum began before 1900, the real impetus for improving the area of general education came in the thirties. Educational leadership encouraged schools to try new approaches to curriculum organization. Educators were dissatisfied with the organization of the curriculum in sequential courses because this organization stressed specialization rather than general education. It limited the number of subjects or fields explored by any given student, and led to covering large amounts of detailed knowledge; but it frequently failed to give students an understanding of the significance of the field in relation to the problems of daily living. Furthermore, logical, sequential organization of knowledge in any given area proved to have meaning and significance only to a small number of individuals. Schools tried ways of breaking down barriers between subjects.

Departures from the subject-matter organization of the central courses of the curriculum (those subjects required of all students) were sometimes referred to as experiments with the "core" of the curriculum. Thus the term "core curriculum" has widely come to mean any curriculum approach that departs from the logical, sequential organization of knowledge.

A Core program may be classified either as structured or unstructured, depending upon the limits of planning set in advance by the staff. In a structured Core program, the staff decides in advance which areas or centers of experience the students will explore. It is the structured or subject-centered Core program which serves the needs of students of the Omaha Public School system. This program was introduced with the opening of the first junior high school in 1956, Monroe Junior High School. The schedule was characterized by a three-period block with one teacher in grades seven and eight. This "Core Block" was to provide for the gradual transition of students from the self-contained elementary school to the completely departmentalized program of 9th grade. The program was designed also to help students deal with problems of both personal and societal concern under a teacher who knew them well. The Core teacher still continues to provide a major portion of the day-to-day guidance that is so vital during the transition years.

PURPOSE OF THE CORE CURRICULUM

The Core program in the Omaha Public Schools refers to a course in the common learnings which is designed to provide learning experiences needed by all youth. To this end, the seventh and eighth grade Core program guides the student through learning experiences that develop skills and at the same time intergrate content areas, emphasize democratic ideals, and help meet the student's personal-social needs.

In addition, to the "basic learning" concept, the Core program has a distinct pattern of organization. The Core class meets for a double period; in some schools three periods are included in the "block" for which it is scheduled. The basic subjects included in the Core block are English and social studies. Usually, one teacher teaches the Core class.

GOALS OF THE CORE PROGRAM

1. Provide articulation between the one-teacher elementary classroom and the multiple-teacher high school classes.
2. Insure a stabilizing influence or home base in the students' school day by furnishing a longer block of time with one teacher who knows them well.
3. Provide effective guidance opportunities by observing the students' behavior pattern in many types of situations during the block of time.
4. Allow for individual differences by observing more than one subject area in which a child manifests weaknesses or strengths.
5. Provide opportunity for correlation of subject matter and the application of skills from one area to another.
6. Teach skills in context.
7. Provide flexibility for adapting instruction to student need and interest.

COMPONENTS OF THE CORE PROGRAM

The Core teacher in the junior high school is responsible for two or three groups of pupils which meet daily for two or three periods.

The seventh and eighth grade curriculum is based on three correlated areas: social studies, language arts and "built in" guidance.

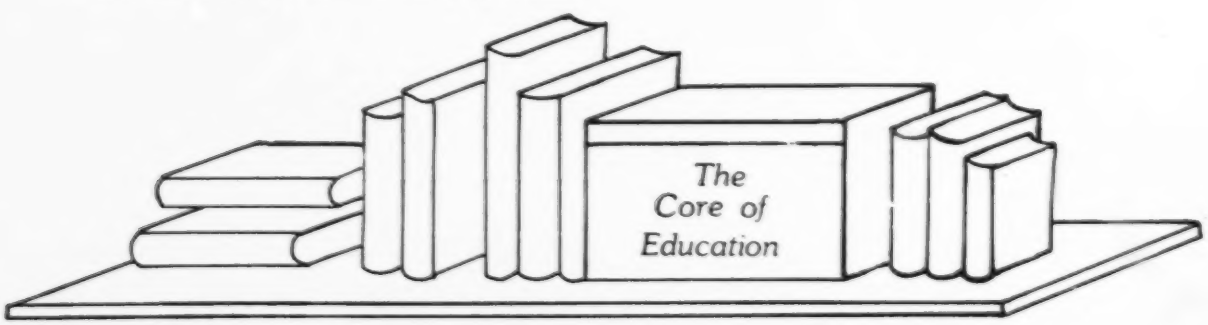
Social Studies Area

The social studies component of the Core program bears the primary responsibility for acquainting the students with the social world in which mankind once lived, the world in which mankind now lives and the social world that is emerging. The subject draws its content from history, geography, political science, and other social science disciplines.

A. Eighth Grade Social Studies

This subject area includes American History, plus units on Nebraska History and contributions of minority cultures.

A noteworthy innovation has been a division of content in American history between the eighth grade and the eleventh grade. Eighth grade concentrates on the historical era between the discovery of America and the Reconstruction Period. This change affords in-depth study and uses the problem-solving approach.



B. Seventh Grade Social Studies

This content area is based on a study of the Eastern hemisphere. It is approached from the angle that, as citizens of the world, we effect and are affected by a multitude of global events. In today's interdependent and shrinking world, it is important that students see similarities and dissimilarities within this framework.

Language Arts Area

To keep pace with life's mounting complexities, today's student must be increasingly literate and articulate. Pursuant to these needs, communication skills, which encompass reading, writing, speaking, and listening, are the essence of seventh and eighth grade language arts program.

A balance of oral and written activity is stressed by:

> Using what the students do well in the middle and junior high years—talk. Improving what they also need to do well—write.

Composition is taught. The conventions of sentence structure, punctuation and spelling are stressed for this age group.

In junior high Core, language arts is tantamount to social studies. Research skills are taught and applied in social studies context. Over and beyond basic reading, the geographic and historical content of social studies is enhanced by supportive literature. Business letter skills are applied as students write to the foreign embassies. Grammar and usage skills are pursued in English instruction and then directly applied to creative writing and social studies experiences.

A. Instructional Goals

1. To help enrich the students' understanding and appreciation of the structure, the beauty, and the utility of the English language.
2. To help students improve auditory discrimination and visual observation.
3. To help students build permanent spelling power.
4. To help students understand that many seemingly erratic spellings are explainable through a study of the history or origin of our language.
5. To read for enjoyment as well as recall.
6. To develop an appreciation for good literature.
7. To perceive a need for the use of standard English.
8. To develop skills and competencies in using grammar as a tool in effective writing and speaking.
9. To improve work habits and pride in oral and written communication.

B. Reading and Literature

Reading, which is a part of the language arts program, varies from building to building. Some schools have a three-hour block during which Core teachers also teach reading. In others, Core teachers teach reading but to mixed Core groups. In still other schools with a two-hour block, there are separate reading teachers.

Over and beyond basic reading, all Core teachers teach supplementary literature that correlates with social studies or guidance. This integration lends meaning and enhances learning in both content areas.

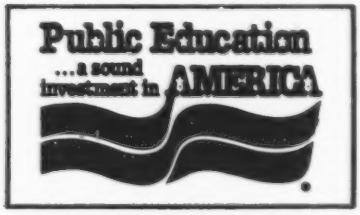
C. Spelling

The study of spelling is closely related to reading in that emphasis is given to the phonetic approach to word analysis. Words are supplied and studied in context. Vocabulary from the social studies area is also part of the spelling content. Handwriting skills are reinforced in spelling and in the total language arts program.

The Guidance Area

Although guidance is not taught as a separate area, concern for guidance infuses the entire Core curriculum. The longer time block affords opportunity for a home base with a teacher who knows and understands the students well. It is considered an important component of the Core program. The Core teacher spends more time with her students than do other teachers and gets to know them better. The extended time allows the Core teachers to observe the students as they accept responsibility, work with committees, speak, listen, etc. Teachers are able to resolve many of the problems of the young adolescent, rooted in his relationship with others through the group situation. The Core curriculum provides opportunity for the teacher to do something about the students unmet needs through proper guidance.

The Core program offers a promising method of helping young people to meet their individual and social needs without totally relying upon a dualistic organization of guidance apart from instruction. Core teachers perform the basic guidance function through individual counseling contacts with their Core students.



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